

# SUSTAINABILITY IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPLY CHAIN

## About this project:

Since March 2016 UK universities and purchasing consortia have been inviting their suppliers to access an innovative, online Supplier Engagement Tool which:

Supports suppliers to **develop a Net Positive Sustainability Action Plan for their business**



Helps suppliers **understand the positive contribution their business makes** to the environment, society and the economy **as well as exploring their impacts**



**Gathers data on the sustainability actions** being undertaken by suppliers to Higher Education, identifies their priorities and outlines the positive impact they are having



Enables the universities and purchasing consortia participating in the project to **demonstrate progress in relation to the Modern Slavery Act (2015)**



Here we share how the Higher Education sector is using this approach to lead the way!

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## What does it look like for a supplier? Quotes from suppliers:

1. The supplier provides some basic company information (size, location, type of activity etc.)
2. They explore and prioritise issues relevant to their business (using a NETpositive<sup>1</sup> approach)
3. The tool automatically generates a bespoke Sustainability Action Plan, which can be further updated and customised

The Sustainability Action Plan generated is not only free but also based on the very latest sustainability thinking.

<sup>1</sup>This includes environmental, social and economic impacts that are both positive and negative

"Really nice and simple to use; I have seen a few of these types of thing over the years, and this is by far the best. Simple and concise, but still focuses our minds on constant improvement. We try to be as proactive as possible within the constraints of our business and what our end users will accept, but there is always more we can do."

**Davin Miller, Sales Manager New England Biolabs UK Ltd**

"We have now completed this sustainability plan tool. I found the process interesting and a positive way of continuing to realise the areas in which we are doing well, the areas [in which] we could improve and also a framework for developing a plan for this improvement."

**John Davey, Director Ideas Agency Ltd**

"The tool proved a great prompt to help us consider our approach to sustainability. We were able to use it as part of our ISO140001 submission and have built it into our formal systems now."

**Kevin Ashby, Director, All Purpose Ltd**

# TAKING A LEAD ON MODERN SLAVERY

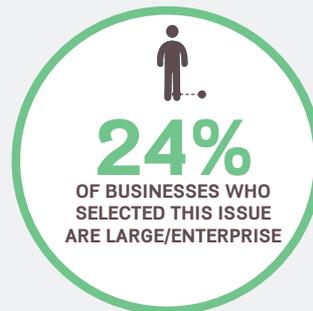
Since the introduction of the Modern Slavery Act (2015) organisations with a turnover of over £36 million have been busy producing statements outlining their response to the Act.

Although only larger organisations are currently obliged to produce statements, we believe that SMEs will be significantly impacted as scrutiny of supply chains intensifies. The HE sector has long been committed to pro-active engagement with SMEs in their supply chain and so this issue can be an opportunity to support good practice at the same time as reducing risk.

The Supplier Engagement Tool is already helping to establish baselines, gather evidence and demonstrate practical examples of how different businesses are responding to the challenges presented by the Modern Slavery Act.

Data generated by use of the Supplier Engagement Tool in the HE Sector already tells us that:

## OF THE 2500 REGISTERED TO THE TOOL:



The Higher Education sector is leading the way with its ability to demonstrate how businesses (especially SMEs) are responding to the challenge of eradicating Modern Slavery. This baseline allows the sector to understand the scale of the challenge and even identify where it might help!

Using the evidence from the Tool institutions can turn 'supplier engagement' into 'supplier development' allowing the Higher Education Sector to support its supply chain to do even more on this key issue with targeted awareness and engagement activities.

# COMMITMENT TO ACTION

Compliance issues all too often focus on the detail of policy rather than the reality of practice.

The Tool supports the Higher Education sector to better understand what its supply chain is **doing** rather than what it is **saying**.

Understanding the priority issues for the businesses supplying the sector puts HE in a stronger position to have meaningful dialogue, provide appropriate challenge and support and ensure positive contributions are identified along the way.

By using the Tool to develop their Sustainability Action Plans suppliers have told us:

## Their top 5 issues are:

- Customer feedback is important to us
- We are keen to communicate with our customers
- We take our health & safety responsibilities seriously
- We keep up-to-date with new technology or approaches to working so we can identify innovation or gains in efficiencies
- Our goods (or our people) travel

## Their bottom 5 issues are:

- Modern Slavery is an issue for our business
- Our activities have an impact in our immediate locality
- We could do more to improve the formal relationships with our staff
- We produce commercial waste that is sent to landfill
- We should know more about where the things we buy come from and how they are made

We can use this information to determine how closely our institutional or sector-wide priorities are aligned with those of our suppliers.

## The top 10 completed actions are:

- Have a meaningful process for dealing with customer feedback
- Ensure your staff can be responsive
- Understand that communication is a two-way process
- Be transparent about customer feedback
- Go beyond health & safety compliance
- Keep up-to-date with new developments within your sector
- Explore options that reduce the need for business travel
- Offer sustainable travel options
- Understand the travel impacts of your business
- Issue a positive environmental policy

We can use this as evidence to inform ongoing engagement with the supply chain. As a result, the Higher Education sector is well positioned to target precious resources into meaningful engagement with its suppliers.

All of this at the same time as telling a powerful positive story!

## The bottom 10 actions completed are:

- Look to remove waste from your business
- Find ways to support local SMEs as part of your procurement process
- Provide training for staff on Modern Slavery
- Let staff shape your sustainability strategy and implementation
- Ask suppliers for feedback
- Carry out an audit of any positive impacts you could have
- Publish your Modern Slavery Act transparency statement
- Engage with your suppliers on Modern Slavery
- Complete a materiality analysis
- Carry out an audit of your negative impacts